

### The ways of revenge in Chilas, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan: Shia-Sunni clashes as blood feuds

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## The Ways of Revenge in Chilas, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan: Shia-Sunni Clashes as Blood Feuds

Muhammad Azam Chaudhary

### Introduction

From 1981 to 1995 I have been a member of the Pakistani-German Study Group engaged in exploring the different regions and aspects of Gilgit-Baltistan's (GB) society and cultures. In this project, I was part of the sub-group documenting rock-carvings and inscriptions discovered in Chilas, District Diamer. Besides helping the documentation of the rock-carvings and inscriptions, I was also exploring different aspects of the life of the people of Chilas. One of the topics of my research during this time was blood feuds. My initial attention to this topic was drawn by the driver of our project named Akram<sup>1</sup>. He was a very fascinating character. He was initially hired along with his very old jeep to drive part of our team (mainly two German cartographers) to different working stations. He was a total illiterate but brilliant in picking up words of English and German to narrate fascinating stories. Many of those stories were, unfortunately, stories of murder. He generally started these stories like this: "Buttogah, two Muslims full-finish – tischu, tischu" (Two people were killed in Buttogah; "tischu" is the imitation of the sound of bullets). For those injured during such conflicts he would say: "five Muslims half-finish". In the beginning these stories sounded like fiction to me especially because I came from a very different cultural background in Pakistan (Punjab). But then one day, a friend was murdered on suspicion of illicit sexual relations. Sometimes later, Zafaran, who worked for the project, killed his sister and her paramour in their fields for alleged illicit sex. With these, at least, last two cases I felt myself dragged into exploring about blood feuds.

In the autumn of 2013, I revisited Gilgit-Chilas after a break of almost two decades and found it very different from those days. The most striking and conspicuous of all the changes was the overshadowing presence of military in the form of security posts at almost every corner and crossing where private and public transport vehicles were stopped and searched. Intelligence agency personnel visited us in the hotels almost on a daily basis. Vehicles, especially, buses, vans and cars traveled on the Karakorum Highway (KKH) as caravans escorted by heavy police contingents. The vehicles were searched and passengers were registered, at least, at twenty different spots on the KKH.

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1 All the names used in this article are fictive.

This was mainly due to the Shia-Sunni violence in GB. Many terrible acts of violence had occurred over the last two years (2012-2013). On February 28, 2012, eighteen Shias were killed on the Karakoram Highway in Kohistan district. On April 3, nine passengers were killed in Gonar Farm area close to Chilas. On August 16, some buses were intercepted at Babusar and twenty-two people were killed. In the year 1988 I was almost a participant observer in the preparations for the big *lashkar* that attacked Shia villages near Gilgit in which more than hundred people were killed. District Diamer and Kohistan, especially Chilas, was reported as the epicenter of most of the violence against the Shias. In this paper I want to explain why Kohistan and Diamer are so prominent in this violence and especially why such big mobs come together for this violence.

Much has been written on causes of Shia-Sunni sectarian violence in Pakistan at the macro level. Shia-Sunni violence has also been analyzed with particular reference to GB by several scholars (Grieser and Sökefeld [forthcoming], Sökefeld 2010, PILDAT 2011, Hunzai 2013, The Express Tribune 2012). Different reasons and dimensions of the Shia-Sunni violence in GB have been highlighted in this literature. The factors mentioned in this literature could be grouped into the background, the Pakistani political structure and the outside factors categories. The background group may relate to the spreading of Islam, the distribution of different Muslim sects in the region and the role of the colonial government and administration. The role of Pakistani state and its establishment especially the military, for instance, Zia Ul Haq's politics of Islamization makes the second group. The external factors category include the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran on Pakistani soil, the strategic location of the region, i.e. its being part of the disputed territory between Pakistan and India, and its proximity to the China's border. Such an analysis, though relevant, fails to explain the micro-sociological dynamics of the conflict which in my view are important for a proper understanding of the situation.

The focus of this paper is on what may be termed as the 'structure of violence', i.e. cultural dynamics of the Shia-Sunni violence with a particular focus on the Sunni population who inhabit predominantly the southern parts of GB, i.e. the district Diamer and its adjoining areas. My assumption in this regards is that Shia-Sunni clashes and killings are carried out like blood feuds by the people of Diamer who live in a tribal set up called *Yagh-estan* (the lawless people). This is a very dynamical society especially with reference to the formation of groups which change according to the demand of the circumstances. This is comparable to what Evans-Pritchard (1940) has described about the Nuer, the so called principle of fission and fusion. Any groups, according to Evans-Pritchard, tends to split into opposed parts, these parts tend to fuse in relation to other groups. (1940: 148) The link between Shia-Sunni clashes and blood feuds became clear to me during my recent

visit (2013) to Chilas where I could interview a number of local people on topics like the planned construction of the Diamer-Basha-Dam on the Indus, Shia-Sunni clashes and blood feuds. For the people of Chilas the answer was very simple:

*“Sunni are very frequently killed in Gilgit but because the government, administration and even media in Gilgit are almost completely in the hands of Shias, they are silently buried. But since the Sunni in Gilgit are from our area and have relatives here we get information. We stand in an obligation to take the revenge of these killings according to the local custom. Since the conflict is not personal the entire community shares this obligation.”* (Field notes)

I tend to agree with Abou Zahab's (2010: 164) views that Shia-Sunni violence in GB is the result of a multiplicity of factors, most of them not related to religion. Therefore these have to be taken into account while analyzing sectarianism at the grassroots level. This proves, for instance, that the *lashkar* (civilian armed force) attacking Shia villages in 1988 were not something unique about the Shia-Sunni conflict. It happens on and off in tribal societies that an entire group or even valley takes up arms against another group of the equal size. This was also demonstrated by a very recent clash between Diamer and Kohistan, two neighboring regions of which one is part of GB and the other of the adjoining Province Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Both of them are Sunni. The headline in the newspaper The Gilgit-Baltistan Bulletin 2014 read: “Gilgit-Baltistan boundary claim between KPK and GB costs 7 lives.” According to the details at least seven people were killed and a large number were injured in a clash between armed civil forces (*lashkar*) of district Diamer and district Kohistan. It was a dispute over the location of the boundary between two villages. The Diamer farmers claimed that the Kohistanis captured four hundred of their goats which they refused to return. A *lashkar* from Diamer attacked Kohistanis who had already come together expecting the reaction from Diamer (Gilgit Baltistan Bulletin: 2014).

I want to propose that blood feuds are part of a larger concept called *badal* or revenge in the local culture. Revenge is a behavior which demands ideally ‘a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye’, but in actual practice the revenge, as it was so aptly described by Durkheim, has “the tendency to surpass in severity the action against which it is reacting (...). That is because the passion which is the soul of punishment ceases only when exhausted. (...) it often extends further than the culpable and reaches the innocent, his wife, his children his neighbours, etc.” (1933: 86) *Badal* does not only mean killing; it can be as simple as for instance an angry look for an angry look, or calling a bad name for calling a bad name. The case studies in the coming pages, especially No. 1 and No. 3, are also examples of *badal*. In the Case Study 3 a man runs

away with the future bride of another man. The *jirga* (council of village elders and respectables) decides that instead the sister of the man who ran away be given in marriage to the aggrieved. In Case Study 1 three brothers pronounce *ghag* (publicly declaring a woman as future wife without her and her family's consent) on the three daughters of their uncle who refused to marry them to his nephews. But of course the worst and not so uncommon form of revenge in tribal society is murder which is often linked to issues of marriage and sexuality of the women of one's family or of the opponents. For this study the relevant aspect of the revenge is the *obligation* of revenge i.e. the question of whose duty it is to take revenge, especially of murder. It is, first of all, the sons, father and brothers who must take revenge but if they are not in a position to do so automatically cousins are involved and after them the larger segments of the society and finally the entire population. This depends on the size and structure of the opponents. Where and how did the tribal structure and blood feuds come to this area? Let us start with the ethnographic setting of the area.

### Ethnographic Setting

I have done my field research in Chilas where I also lived and worked for more than fifteen years until some eighteen years ago. Last year, in 2013, I revisited Chilas for a few days and was thereby able to refresh some of the data among others on topics of Shia-Sunni violence, blood feuds and the Diamer-Bash-Dam. Chilas is located approximately 130 km south of Gilgit. It is the headquarters of the Diamer District. According to the population census of 1981 it had a total population of less than 150,000 people<sup>2</sup> which included the subdivisions of Astor, Tangir-Darel and Chilas. Astor in the meantime has been made a separate district.

The most evident change I immediately noticed coming back to Chilas after such a long time was the expanded bazaars and presence of mobile phones. The most discussed topic at this time was the Diamer-Basha-Dam; especially the compensation money given for the land and houses which will be inundated by the reservoir to be built on the Indus river below Chilas. The people were very enthusiastic about the dam because most of them were receiving a handsome amount of compensation money. They were also discussing the future job prospects related to the construction of the dam. Interesting in this regards was the dispute about the area where the Diamer-Bash-Dam is to be built as both GB and KPK claimed this territory. This is important for the decision about who will get the royalty for electricity produced from the dam. Interesting was that in this controversy the people of Chilas took a united stand with the people of GB against KPK, their allies against the Shias in Shia-Sunni violence.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Census Report, 1981, the total population of district Diamer was 122,690 (quoted in: Khan 1992-a: 293).

In the year 1981, when I first time came to Chilas, there was hardly any market. The KKH had only recently been completed. An important consequence of the construction of the KKH was the easy transport of the very precious forest wood to the down-country markets. This God given easy money from selling timber was mainly spent on the purchase of 'modern' weapons especially the highly prized Kalashnikovs which had been easily available since the beginning of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. These weapons were highly valued because of their use for deterrence and revenge. These weapons were openly discussed and displayed on every possible occasions, such as marriage, birth of a male child or a dispute. One of my key informants told me proudly that there were as many Kalashnikov in his house as the number of males – they were eight brothers. The acquisition of such weapons led to an unprecedented increase in the number of blood feuds in the region. Some of the money though was also spent on the education but only of male children. There is a girls' school but female education has no priority especially among the dominant indigenous population groups (Yeshkuns and Shins).

This was slightly different among the non-indigenous people living in the area who do not possess any land and are therefore called *ghair-malik* (non-owners). Among them are groups like the Soniwal, but the largest of these groups was the Pukhtuns. Except those involved in the timber business, most of the Pukhtun population were of lower economic status. They were often dependent on the indigenous population. A Pukhtun informant told me once that the indigenous population considers the Pukhtuns *beghairat* (without honour), for Pukhtuns send their women to schools for education, take them to hospitals if required and sometimes even take them out in their cars (if they have) for important occasions. One can imagine the conservativeness of the indigenous population from the fact that seclusion of women among Pukhtuns is well known as is also the high rate of blood feuds among them, but Yeshkun and Shin certainly take pride in being even more conservative and having an even higher rate of blood feud.

The area belonging to the Chilas sub-division of the Diamer district has been deforested to a very large extent and the timber-money has already been consumed. The construction of Diamer-Bhasha-Dam is going to affect the land and houses of Chilas for which compensation money is being paid. Compared to the timber money which was mainly spent on the purchase of weapons most of the dam compensation money is used for buying cars and houses. I was told by some of my old informants that the institution of feuds is no more as highly rated as it used to be but I had the impression that actually no big change had taken place. I got this impression after trying to meet Hussain Ahmed who was my host and key informant during my research in 1980s. I traced him through his mobile phone but he did not disclose his whereabouts. He did not share even with his closest friends where he was, neither when, how and on which route he would be coming to an appoint-



ment. This was the first principle of blood revenge custom: Never trust anybody. I remember he told me never to come to his house in the dark and not to bring other people along.

The entire region south of Gilgit, which mainly includes the districts of Diamer (Tangir, Darel, Chilas) and Indus-Kohistan has been very different from other parts of Gilgit-Baltistan. It is, for instance, the only part of GB where the population is hundred percent Sunni. Similarly this area is different in terms of socio-political structure. It was the only region of the GB that was tribal and that had no formal system of centralized government. The other parts of GB like Gilgit, Hunza, Nagar, Shigar, Khaplu, Skardu, Yasin and Punial were all kingdoms in the past. It was called *Yaghestan*, that is, the land of lawlessness and warfare. A significant aspect of the Yaghestani way of life is the institution of *badal* or blood feud. A Punjabi journalist who visited the area wrote: "They love their feuds more than their children, they rather produce children for a successful vengeance and for producing many children they marry several wives" (Deed Shneed, 1992). The highest murder rate prevailed in Tangir and Darel, with Chilas having the second highest rate. Blood feuds do not exist in Astor.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that the ethnographic research<sup>4</sup> for the present study was carried out mainly in Chilas and, therefore, the analysis and conclusion are limited to that area. The population of the subdivision of Chilas was approximately 50,000 according to the 1981 census. The subdivision includes the town of Chilas and a number of valleys, such as Butogah, Thak, Gichi, Thor, Hodur, Thalpan and Ges. In the views of my informants the average number of murders per year was more than thirty persons. It is important to keep in mind also the large number of persons who survive the killing attempts.

There are only few families who are not involved in a blood feud. People do not dare to go out into the streets in the dark. Weapons are their permanent companions. They carry at least a pistol or a revolver under their shirts

3 Data about population and area have been taken from Khan 1992a. The statistics about the number of murders per year are from the Chilas Police records I could consult but generally not made public. Chilas had a population of 43,000 in 1981, and there were 24 and 25 murder cases in 1993 and 1994, respectively. Tangir-Darel had a population of 37,000 in 1981, and there were 23 and 30 murder cases in 1993 and 1994, respectively. Similarly, Astor had a population of 47,000 in 1981, with one murder registered in 1993 and two registered in 1994.

4 Since 1982 I stayed every year for two to three months in Chilas as a member of the Pakistan-German study group, the Research Cell of the Heidelberg Academy of Humanities and Sciences, documenting rock-carvings and inscriptions in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, especially in the region of Chilas. Special attention to the collection of material on blood feuds was given during my stays over the last four years of that period.



during the day and sleep with a gun at their side at night. Those who are on the revenging side of the feud try to keep themselves informed about the activities of the other party, in order to waylay them. They employ spies for getting information about their opponents whereas the other party tries to keep its activities a secret. There is strong social pressure to take revenge if it is due. And people are practically forced by this pressure to take revenge. Blood revenge is taken by the nearest relatives, such as the son, brother, father, uncle, or cousin, and often it is done collectively. Before coming to the question of what blood feuds are and how they are linked to the Shia-Sunni violence, let me first pursue the question how and why blood feuds came to this area.

### The Genesis of Blood Feuds

I have already mentioned in the last section that the central, northern and eastern valleys of GB were all princely states each ruled by a more or less hereditary (elder son inherits rule after the death of the father) ruler. The southern regions of GB (Diamer, but also adjoining Kohistan) were without a central government and were called “republican” or “acephalous” societies in the literature. Different sects of Islam spread in the above mentioned regions from 14<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Baltistan became predominantly a Shia, Diamer a Sunni, and Gilgit (except Nager which is Shia) an Ismaili region.<sup>5</sup> We know from oral traditions as well as written records that before Islamization the region of Diamer and Kohistan also had princely states. I was told by several people from Chilas that Karar, a Hindu, was the last ruler of Chilas. The names of ruins such as *Shahi Mahal* (royal palace) in Darel speak for themselves. Asad Ali Khan, a local scholar, writes: “A long time ago a Hindu Raja Chachi ruled Chilas. At his death there was a war between his two sons Mat Chack and Booth. The latter was successful and became the last ruler of the area” (Khan 1992-a: 291, English translation by the author. See also Biddulph 1977: 16). Similarly according to John Staley:

*“The early travelers recorded traditions that several of the acephalous states were formerly governed by rulers .... In Darel people point out ‘the ruler’s polo ground’; in Chilas they have preserved the name of a ruler; and in Kandia they still tell stories of Kandi...”* (Staley 1982: 183)

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5 Regional administrative boundaries should not be taken in the strict sense. By Gilgit I do not only mean the town of Gilgit but the upper Gilgit Valley, Yasin, Punial, Hunza, etc. The town of Gilgit is inhabited by all the ethnic and religious groups as a result of its centrality. In Baltistan, besides Shias, there are a lot of Nurbakhsis, some even estimate them to be one-fourth of the total population. There were some sectarian changes in the history of the area, but the general character of the area remained as already described.

The question arises why the new religion (Islam) should lead to the change of the political structure in the south, for example in the present Diamer District, but not in the northern and eastern parts, the areas of Baltistan and Gilgit. Staley again gives a possible explanation:

*“(...) missionaries and religious leaders came from countries to the north and west where Islam was well established under centralized rule (...) and so they would not have thought it necessary to make political changes. (...) On the other hand the southern valleys were converted by missionaries who came from further south, from the territories occupied by the Pathans. Indeed most of these missionaries were Pathans, and they approached their task in a different way (...) No doubt their thrones and administrations were destroyed too, for these Pathan missionaries, as well as introducing a more orthodox form of Islam, seem to have imposed wholesale the institutions and practices that they were familiar with in the Pathan territories further south.” (Staley 1982: 185-87)*

The further evidence of Pukhtun or Pukhtun also known as Pathan missionaries introducing the new socio-political structure is the existence or former existence of some of the following typical Pukhtun institutions: the *wesh* system (the system of periodical re-allotment of land, now no more practiced in Diamer); *kalang* lands (a contract according to which a piece of land is given for a fixed amount of money for an indefinite time under certain conditions), and joint community land and water rights, with the division of the community into owners and non-owners of these rights. The *wesh* system is a typical Pukhtun institution that was introduced in Swat, which lies around two hundred kilometers south of Chilas, after its conquest by Pukhtuns between A.D 1500 and 1600.<sup>6</sup> The available literature on the history of the area reflects that the *wesh* system existed here<sup>7</sup> before it was abolished even in Swat, the area of its origin.<sup>8</sup> Hence, if we accept that an acephalous system and Islam were brought to the region by the Pukhtuns and that the blood feuds began after this religious-political change,<sup>9</sup> the question arises whether the blood

6 For details see Ahmed 1976; Barth 1959; Ahmad 1962.

7 See Jettmar 1983; Zarin & Schmidt 1984; Staley 1982: 196.

8 For details see Ahmed (1976: 37) and Barth (1985: 69).

9 Thull (in Dir, a part of present Swat) offers another example of Pukhtun Sunni Islam giving birth to blood feuds. Keiser writes about the genesis of organized vengeance in Thull: "The cultural values, concepts, and ideas so important to organized vengeance in contemporary Thull were probably introduced at the same time Pukhtun missionaries converted the Kohistanis to Islam. Their effect on existing social organization and culture set in motion processes of change that ultimately resulted in a new, unique Kohistani sociocultural system". (Keiser 1991: 46-47).

feuds were a by-product of the new religion (Sunni Islam), or the result of the Pukhtun acephalous political culture. The two are very often mixed together but this differentiation is important because of its political implications, on the one hand, and in seeking an end to this custom, on the other hand as I will explain it now.

Let us start with the assumption that Sunni Islam gave birth to the blood feuds. As previously mentioned, the district of Diamer consisted of three subdivisions, Astor, Tangir-Darel, and Chilas. I have already written that in Astor which was, in terms of population and area, the biggest of the three subdivisions, the average number of murders per year is between one and two which is actually not part of the system of organized vengeance we are dealing with here. It is interesting that the Astoris, too, are Sunnis (though with a sizeable Shia presence), but theirs is a Sunni Islam that came to Astor via Kashmir. The other existence of Sunni Islam is in the Kaghan Valley, the southeastern neighbor of Chilas. There again, we find no system of blood feuds. Kaghan, too, received Sunni Islam via Kashmir. It is interesting that even Chilas received the first wave of Islam via the Babusar Pass (i.e. from the Kaghan side<sup>10</sup>), but later on, the Pukhtun influence from the south became more dominant. This is perhaps one of the reasons that until the end of the nineteenth century the blood feuds in Chilas were less frequent than today as was observed by Biddulph: "The crime of murder is rare, and the readiness to spill blood on slight occasions so noticeable among the Afghans is unknown" (Biddulph 1977: 18).

In concluding the analysis, it might be said that the acephalous or tribal political structure, introduced by the Pukhtuns, is responsible for the origin of the blood feuds in Chilas. This may be called a confirmation of, in the literature, widely debated positive link between the segmentary lineage system and the blood feuds that Knudsen (2011: 2-7) has thoroughly reviewed. Without going into further details of the origin of feuds I want to come back to our main focus which is the link between Shia-Sunni violence and blood feuds. In order to understand this link it is important to understand the whole concept of blood feuds first. I have chosen to start by introducing some cases related to blood feuds..

### Three Case Studies: a Prologue

The following cases are not about the Shia-Sunni violence in GB but in my view their study and analysis is important because they help us understand the core values of this society. The cases below have been chosen from the

10 Asad Ali Khan writes: "Syed Noor Shah, known as Ghazi Baba, was the first man who started preaching Islam in Thak and built the first mosque which is still there (though some changes have been made). Ghazi Baba belonged to the Syed family of Kaghan. In Tangir and Darel, Islam came from the Swat direction." (Khan 1992: 291, English translation by the author)

newspapers. There are several reasons for selecting these cases from the newspapers in spite of some possible inaccuracies in these cases. The first and most important reason is that cases of revenge are almost always related to women (as is also the case in our cases) which are very sensitive and can easily lead to very dangerous consequences especially in a relatively small community where I have done my research. Besides that the three cases chosen here represent cases that occur very seldom like for instance the case of *ghag* (publicly declaring a woman as one's future wife without her and her family's consent) and *swara* (giving of a woman as a wife to an opposed party in order to end a feud) but they represent the basic values of this society. The cases of revenge and blood feuds in Pakistan are found mainly among Pukhtuns and their neighboring territories where the impact of their culture reached as far as, for instance, the districts of Diamer and Kohistan. It is interesting and as it has already been mentioned that the instance of blood feuds is even higher in areas influenced by Pukhtun culture though Pukhtuns may not be the dominant population groups there as for instance is the case of Dir-Kohistan, Swat-Kohistan, Indus-Kohistan and Diamer. As I wrote above, some of my Pukhtun informants even told me that the local people consider them *beghairat* (without honour) especially because the Pukhtuns sometimes take their women to hospitals or send them to schools.

#### Case 1

A Pakistani daily, 'The News' (2013) reported that three persons used the word of *ghag* on the three daughters of their uncle and wanted to marry the girls without their consent and free will. *Ghag* is a custom whereby a person declares by spoken or written words or firing in the air in public that a particular woman stands engaged to him. This is done without her or her parents' free will. This declaration implies that her parents and other close relatives are threatened not to give her hand in marriage to any other person and that no other man should make a marriage proposal nor marry her. *Ghag* has been declared as an offence by the Provincial Assembly of KPK in 2013 and is punishable with up to seven years imprisonment or Rs 5000,000 fine, or both. Thus it is very rare but sometimes still practiced.

#### Case 2

'The News' (2013) reported that Ms. Amsala was engaged to Mr. Rahmatullah. Rehman a close relative of Rahmatullah, developed a love affair with the girl and they ran away together. After a few days the father, an uncle and a cousin of Rahmatullah found and killed both Amsala and Rehman. Interestingly, the police arrested Rehman's brother because he did not register the case against the killers.

### Case 3

In the daily “Dawn” (August 2011) it was reported that six members of a *jirga*, including a local prayer leader, were arrested for giving a female in *swara* to a rival family for settling a dispute. According to the details the dispute originated after a woman had eloped with a man called Imran although she was already engaged with her cousin Tariq. The *jirga* was convened to settle the dispute. The *jirga* decided to give Imran’s sister in marriage to Tariq. The police arrested the members of the *jirga* for violating the 310-A section of Pakistan Penal Code which prohibits giving of females to rival families for settling feuds.

### Embedding the Cases

Lindholm wrote that the most basic principle of social organization of Swat – and the social organization of Diamer is very close to it – is the:

*“(...) principle of ‘complementary opposition’ (...). Each lineage or khel stands in a relation of opposition to its closest neighbour of an equal level. Thus the different sections of a village are in opposition, but will unite should they be threatened by another village. (...) this system not only structures political, economic, and social life, not only organizes people spatially, but also provides a worldview, pervades child raising, forms values, and permeates all possible spheres of human activity and thought”* (Lindholm 1982: xxvii).

In the following paragraphs while explaining and analyzing the above mentioned three cases I have referred to many other cases too for elaborating my point. These other cases I have collected during my fieldwork. *Jirga* is an old institution for conflict-resolution in the area and consists of village elders and respectable persons. *Swara* is a custom according to which women (mainly sisters or daughters) are given in marriage to the opponent families in order to end blood feuds or, as in case study 3, to settle a case of elopement which falls in the general category of illicit sexual relationships. According to the local value system, sexual relationships between a male and a female are only allowed after marriage. Marriages are arranged by families (mainly the parents) to the extent of almost excluding the consent or even the knowledge of the future couple. Engagements which precede marriage are taken very seriously and once engaged the rights and responsibilities of the future bride shift from her father/brother to her future husband and his family.

In very rare cases though, a man who is refused the hand of a woman may fire a gun in the air at her doorstep declaring the proposed woman to be his bride (case study 1). After this any other male wishing to marry this

woman will do so only at the risk of his life. But the man who claims that woman as his bride is himself on a death row because the custom demands his killing by the woman's family. Breaking an engagement is comparable to a divorce which is considered the most serious abuse only for the man in this case. If an engaged woman elopes with another man, or is married to another person, this requires *badal* which generally means the killing of both the engaged woman and her paramour by the originally chosen husband (case study 2). *Swara* which is practiced very rarely provides an alternative solution to *badal*. According to this custom a young unmarried woman (or several women) will be given in marriage to a man (or several men) of an enemy family in order to settle a dispute which generally demands the killing of one or more male members of this woman's family. In elopement cases the *swara* woman, generally the sister of the man accused, is given to the fiancée or husband whose fiancée or wife had eloped or married someone else.

A noteworthy aspect of the case study 3 is that the alleged *swara* victim rejected the charges that she had been given in marriage as a result of a compromise arrived at by the *jirga*. She did so to protect her family and the members of the *jirga*. The latter generally assemble on the request of one or sometimes both parties involved. While local custom acknowledges giving of a female in marriage in order to solve a case of illicit relations or a blood feud, the law of the state forbids this (see case study 3). A large number of state/ Islamic laws contradict the traditional norms and values in general. This is particularly true for customs controlling sex and marriage issues among the local people.

The Quranic punishment for illicit sexual relations is flogging or stoning of the culprits, carried out by the state or community, after at least four trustworthy eye witnesses testify having seen the accused *inflagranti delicto*.<sup>11</sup> In Chilas, the punishment of illicit relations is the killing of both man and woman by the immediate relatives of the woman (husband, brother, father, etc.), without any trustworthy eyewitnesses testifying it or without any due process.<sup>12</sup> Derived from this right is a killing based solely on suspicion and rumors about an illicit relation, the extreme case being the killing of the man who is suspected of trying to approach or getting the attention of a woman.

11 Al-Quran xxiv: 1-64.

12 According to the Frontier Crimes Regulation, the "law for the tribes" which was established by the British and which is still at least theoretically in place, it was lawful for a husband to kill his wife and her paramour if he found them together. However, the Quran allows the following: "And for those who launch a charge against their spouses, and have (in support) no evidence but their own. Their solitary evidence (can be received) if they bear witness four times (with an oath) by Allah that they are solemnly telling the truth ... But it would avert the punishment from the wife, if she bears witness four times (with an oath) by Allah, that (her husband) is telling a lie" (Al-Quran xxiv: 6-8). This means a charge has to be launched and a decision has to be made.



In such cases it is only the men who are killed. My data shows that the overwhelming majority of the murders are based on rumors and suspicions of illicit sexual relations and only men are killed that lead to blood feuds. The characteristic feature of this system is that it is based on the private individual's conception of justice. The blood enmity could be brought to an end if the right to kill could be withdrawn from the individual.

If a man and a woman are caught *in flagranti delicto*, according to the local customs both could be killed. If both are killed, normally no blood revenge follows. It is important that both must be killed together on the spot. If they are killed in different places, blood revenge may be taken. Similarly, if the family of the murdered man does not accept the charge, revenge may also be taken. An example of this is as follows: Zafaran's sister in the case presented at the very beginning in this article, and her paramour were seen together in the fields. The brothers took out their rifles and killed both of them on the spot. One of Zafaran's brothers presented himself before the police and declared that he had killed his sister and her lover on the spot as he saw them making love. In the village, there were other stories told which differed from the story told by the family of Zafaran. For example it was told that the family of the man killed was very poor and that he was the only son. The real affair of the woman was with another rich man but the family of Zafaran did not dare to start a feud with that family. The affair was known in the village and this was a good chance to restore the *ghairat* (which may be translated here as manliness) of Zafaran. The brothers of Zafaran, though collaborators, sent the youngest of the brothers, who was jobless, to confess to the assassination. The eldest brother who had actually killed them remained in the background to arrange his release. The peace was concluded between the two families and Zafaran's brother was set free within less than six months.

The cases of Said Noor and Javaid are other examples from the area: One was killed as the result of a rumor and the other killed only out of suspicion. When Javaid came home he found his neighbor in his house where his sister was alone; he took his rifle and killed him on the spot. The woman fled to the police. The medical examination of the woman proved her innocence. Peace was arranged between the two families and Javaid was released. In the other case, Said Noor went to drink water at the house of his cousin who was not at home. When Said Noor was coming out of the house some neighbors saw him and rumor spread that he had an affair. His cousin killed him some months later. There were attempts to make peace but the family of Said Noor was against peace. It is sometimes mentioned that men kill their wives together with an enemy to get rid of both an enemy and an unwanted wife. But such killing could give rise to a double feud since the family of the wife would want to seek revenge for her murder.



The consent of the couple at the wedding is the basic requirement for any marriage according to the state law. Among the locals,<sup>13</sup> however, such an expression of the couple's intention is neither sought nor even considered decent, especially in the case of the bride. Similarly, eloping adults do not commit an offence under the official law while this is a grave crime, deserving death, according to the local customs. A simple engagement is of little consequence in the state law but is treated almost equivalent to a marriage in the local culture. *Swara*, as we have already stated above, is a crime in the state law.

The individual is held responsible and becomes the target of punishments in the state law. Marriage, sex, divorce, etc. are seen as individual acts and their decisions are assumed to be made by individuals. Following this ideology, in the case study 3, the sister cannot be punished (given in marriage) for the crime (eloping) of the brother. In Diamer society, on the other hand, the values are such that groups like a family act as a corporate unit and the consequences of individual actions are also born collectively. In the case study 3 the elopement had an impact on the honor of the whole family and even the tribe of the eloping woman and her fiancée and his family. Similarly, the target of the revenge is not the single individual but the whole group unless the offender family on its own kills the individual responsible for damaging the honor of the other family. The target groups are of course clearly defined and they vary depending upon the situation following the principle of fission and fusion in segmentary systems (Barth 1959, Ahmed 1976).

In our case study 3 Tariq was engaged to his cousin. She eloped with Imran. The *jirga* decided that Maryam, the sister of Imran, should be given to Tariq in marriage. Maryam, being not involved at all, is punished for the crime of her brother, Imran. When I asked *Pukhtun* female students of my M.A. class at Quaid-i-Azam University they were unanimous in their views that they would accept the role of a *swara* women if such an incident happened in their families. It is pertinent to mention that in feuds, women, children and old men are generally considered neutral and thus never directly targeted or killed in blood feuds. Comparable to *swara*, though actually experienced even more rarely, is a woman of the feuding party going to the house of the opponents with a request to end the feud. *Pukhtunwali* demands the awarding of full respect to the visiting woman and generally her action would terminate the feud. Only in very rare cases, women give testimony against their fathers or brothers upon whom they depend. People live in joint or extended families and their fates are very closely linked together. Local

13 A *Pukhtun* female university student whose life is at risk for refusing engagement with her cousin arranged by her father told me that the opinion and consent of the future brides and grooms are not only not sought it is disliked by their families. She told me, for instance, that if a parent wanted to marry a woman to her cousin but she expresses her liking for that cousin before the proposal, her parents will then not marry her to that cousin.

people may have sympathy with the *swara* woman but consider it justified for a greater cause – saving lives of brothers and fathers.

Similarly, it is not only the *swara*-women who are not asked or consulted for their marriages – generally the consent of marrying couples is irrelevant. Similarly, childhood engagements and marriages are quite common. The *swara*-women that are given in exchange for either a murdered man or an engaged woman who eloped with another man is not so different from the ‘normal’ marriage of a woman. At the time of marriage the family of the woman receives a sum of money as a bride-wealth. The idea and amount of bride wealth differ from family to family and tribe to tribe and even from bride to bride, depending upon her beauty, for example. Some changes have taken place in this custom in the meanwhile. Some fathers keep most of the bride-money for themselves while others are spending all incoming money – and even more than it – on gifts for the bride and the wedding. Almost universal is the idea that the woman becomes the ‘property’ of her husband and his family after marriage. If a married or even an engaged woman runs away with another man it will therefore be her fiancée who is to be paid the compensation. Similarly, if a husband dies early and the woman is still young, her in-laws will decide about her future, as for example, who will marry her then (Mehdi 2002: 147-178). Punishment of sisters for the crimes of their brothers has, similarly, to be seen in the collective family perspective. Death, prison, failure and success of each individual member of the family – especially of male members in this context – is the failure or success, punishment or reward of the whole family. For instance, if a brother or father is killed, all other family members including daughters and sisters are affected. Similarly, the good or bad reputation of one member affects the entire family. The punishment of the sister or the daughter is actually a punishment of the whole family.

Explaining this should not be understood as a defense of *swara*. What I want to emphasize is simply that *swara* is part of a whole value system relating to sex, marriage and family. It is crucial to mention here that *swara* is practiced only in exceptional cases. The custom ideally demands the killing of the eloped couple.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Conflicts frequently occur between close relatives especially cousins, called *tarbur*, a term which means both cousin and enemy. It is no coincidence that all three case studies involved cousins. For instance in our case study 1 three brothers declared the three daughters of their uncle who has refused to give them in marriage to his nephews, *ghag* i.e. their future brides. The uncle disgraced them by refusing the hands of his daughters and they took revenge by declaring these women as their brides.

Let us now jump from the conflicts in close kinship units to violence between large groups based on territories (Kohistan vs Diamer), ethnic (Shin

vs Yeshkun) or religious groups, i.e. Shias vs Sunnis. I have already quoted in the introduction the recent clashes between two territorial units i.e. Diamer and Kohistan, both of whom are Sunni. '*Lashkars* (civil armies) took positions on the opposite mountain sides, seven people were killed and a large number injured.' This was not different from the *lashkar* of 1988 that I have already mentioned in the beginning of the article which went to fight Shias of Gilgit. There were rumors in Chilas at that time that Shias killed some Sunni in Gilgit and that they had further plans to attack and kill other Sunnis in Gilgit.

We know from the relevant literature that the Shia-Sunni clashes in the GB are older than the British rule. Biddulph wrote, for instance, that 'Being Soonees [Sunni], every Shiah who falls into their hand is put to death (...)' (1977: 15). We may not know the exact reason behind the start of Shia-Sunni violence in the region but for this analysis more relevant aspect of this violence is the characteristic feature of blood enmity that once started it runs for generations. A feud actually never ends unless and until there was a settlement between the concerned individuals and groups organized by the *jirga*. Even this may not be a guarantee for ever. I remember, at least, one case from Chilas in which a stranger came and just killed a man on the spot. Later on it turned out that the grandfather of the man killed had fled his area after killing and that the killer was grandson of that person.

The Chilasis complain that the state machinery (government, police, hospitals, etc.) and media, etc. was in the hands of Shia in Gilgit and that it is used against Sunni. They were of the view that when Sunnis are killed in Gilgit there is hardly any reporting in the media. Nobody takes any action against the killers because of Shia Government in Gilgit. The Sunnis in Gilgit are migrants from Chilas and Kohistan who still have relatives living here. Whenever a Sunni is killed in Gilgit we stand an obligation to revenge that killing.

The Shia population of GB complains that Chilasi and Kohistani are religious fanatics and brutal and they kill Shia. I do not agree with the assertion that Chilasi are religious fanatics. Chilasi society is a tribal society where in the absence of any or effective system of justice *badal* serves as deterrence. This is what Max Gluckman calls 'peace in the feud' (Gluckman 1973: 3). The reason that they do not tolerate Shias in their region is because they seem to have an old enmity with them. If they were Sunni religious fanatics then they would kill any non-Sunni/Muslim and not only Shias, for instance Ismails, Christians, etc. I was part of a research group consisting of mainly Germans and some Ismail from Hunza, who lived and worked in Chilas for more than three decades. Nothing happened ever. I think if one respects the Chilasi culture and knows how to behave, one will have no trouble there.

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